

## THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

By Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda

**W**hat is the purpose of Life? This is a very common question that people always ask. It is not easy to give a satisfactory answer to this apparently simple and yet complex question. Although some people have given certain answers according to their way of thinking, it seems that they are not very satisfactory answers to the intellectuals. The reason is that they have not learned to see life objectively and to understand the proper perspective of life. They have created imaginations about life through their limited understanding. At the same time we understand that many religious teachers, great philosophers, well-known poets and great thinkers are also not satisfied about the nature of life. Some have said that life is full of suffering; uncertainty and unsatisfactoriness. Some have said: "How nice if we had not been born." Some others have asked:

“Why were we born to this world to suffer for nothing?”

According to their sayings we can understand that they are the people who have learned to see life objectively, as it really is. But the ordinary man always sees life as it appears superficially, not as it really is. “Life is not that we think ‘life’ but what we think becomes life.” This is another saying of a great thinker.

Some people say that there is no specific purpose in life; yet it can be utilized for any purpose. There is something in this saying for us to ponder wisely: to make use of life for purposes beneficial to ourselves and to humanity instead of wasting it foolishly. In this manner, the purpose of life can be said to be dependent on the way we handle and use it. If we misuse it by violating our good humane qualities, by abusing our human dignity and committing wrongful actions by giving way to our weakness, it is impossible for us to achieve something worthwhile and noble as the purpose of our life. But, if we act wisely and mindfully by observing universally accepted moral and ethical principles, exercise patience, tolerance, sympathy, humility and kindness, create understanding and render selfless service, and train the mind to gain wisdom we should be able to achieve something noble and beneficial to all as the purpose of our life. Those who cultivate such virtues would experience peace, happiness, calm, satisfaction and tranquility. Life would then be worthwhile – it would be a pleasure to live!

## Nature of Life

“Life wastes itself while we are preparing to live,” says one learned man. “Sickness, old age, and miseries are the payment we are making for occupying this body as a house,” says another learned man. “We have to pay the price of fear and worry in order to live as human beings.” This is yet another saying of a religious man. When we consider all these views, we can find out the nature of life and judge if there is any purpose in life.

If we are going to please only our senses as the purpose of our life, then, we must be prepared to face various problems arising from that as no one can enjoy pleasure without facing problems.

Although scientists have discovered wonderful things in this universe yet they too do not know the purpose of life.

In regard to the behaviour of man, one scholar has said: “Man is not what he is, man is what he is not.” According to him, man does not behave as a real ‘Man’. According to Buddhism, Man is not a fixed substantive entity but an expression, existing literally only from moment to moment on the basis of energy. Another scholar has said: “There is no cure for birth and death, save to enjoy the interval.”

We cannot understand the real nature of life due to our ignorance and strong craving. That is why we are here to suffer. That is why it is difficult for us to find out whether there is any specific purpose in life, in this world, and in this form.

Life has been described as a combination of mind and matter. As a result of this combination a being comes into existence and it goes on changing until dissolution takes place. However, departed mental energy again combined with elements or matter reappears in various forms and in different spheres as life in accordance with the nature of one's previous life. This continuity of the life-stream goes on again and again as long as the Karmic energy and craving for existence remains.

### **The Five Aggregates**

In accordance with the Dhamma, life is comprised of five aggregates. They are: *Rupa* – matter, *Vedana* – feeling, *Sanna* – perception, *Sankhara* – mental formations and *Vinnana* – consciousness. Four kinds of elements such as solidity, fluidity, heat and motion comprise matter. Matter plus the four mental factors classified above as feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness combined together form life. The real nature of these five aggregates is explained in the Teaching of the Buddha as follows: Matter is equated to a heap of foam, feeling is like a bubble, perception is described as a mirage, mental formations are like a banana tree and consciousness is just an illusion. With such an analysis of life, it is difficult to ascertain the reality or purpose of life as constituted.

This analysis of life posed a big challenge to many philosophies and religious beliefs at that time.

There is no such thing as permanent life that exists

without changing and without dissolution.

Body is nothing but an abstract generalization for a constantly changing combination of chemical constituents. Man begins to see his own life as a drop in an ever-flowing river and is glad to contribute his part to the great stream of life.

### **A World of Waves**

The scientific analysis of the universe shows that the world is nothing but unbroken continuity of movement. Dr. Einstein said: 'All matter is made of waves and we live in a world of waves.'

“We are part of the same waves.  
If a man can be aware:  
of the states of his body,  
of his feelings,  
of the states of his mind and  
of the states of mental objects,

such an awareness will lead him to find out whether there is any purpose in life.”

### **Change Yourself**

Can you achieve perfection by changing the world? Never. Only you will be able to feel your vanity and placate your egoism. You will be bound to the wheel of *Samsara*. But by changing yourself, by realizing the nature of self through self-denial, self-discipline and self-exertion, you



can achieve perfection. By achieving such perfection, you will be rendering the greatest service to humanity. People will be inspired by your example and they too will follow you and achieve life's goal.

Man today is the result of millions of his past thoughts and actions. He is not ready made; he becomes and continues becoming. His character is determined by his own thinking. Man is not perfect by nature; he has to train himself to be perfect.

Life does not belong to human beings alone. Many other forms of life exist in this universe. However, human beings have greater thinking and reasoning power. In that respect they are superior to other living beings since they have the intelligence to cultivate their way of life in order to get rid of their worldly sufferings. Hence, if the purpose of life is just to get rid of sufferings then human beings can achieve that end through their own effort. But life will be a failure if it is not used properly.

The Buddha stressed on human dignity and discoursed on the value of being human. He painted the most perfect picture of a human being, striving and struggling from life to life in his quest for perfection.

Life is a unique experience. There is nothing with which to compare it, no measure of its value in terms of some other things, and money cannot buy it. Yet many have not learned what to do with this 'priceless pearl'. Here life does not mean the mere physical body or senses but the intelligent human mind.

## Four Types of Men

The Buddha has classified all mankind into four groups.

- Those who work for their own good, but not for the good of others;
- those who work for the good of others, but not for their own good;
- those who work neither for their own good nor for the good of others;
- and those who work for their own good as well as for the good of others.

And who is the person who works for his own good, but not for the good of others? It is he who strives for the abolition of greed, hatred and delusion in himself, but he does not encourage others to abolish greed, hatred and delusion and also does not do anything for the welfare of others.

And who is the person who works for the good of others, but not for his own good? It is he who encourages others to abolish human weaknesses and do some service to them, but does not strive for the abolition of his own weaknesses.

And who is the person who does not work for his own good nor for the good of others? It is he who neither strives for the abolition of his own weaknesses, nor does he encourage others to abolish others weaknesses nor does he do some service to others.

And who is the person who works for his own good as well as for the good of others? It is he who strives for the abolition of evil thoughts from the mind and at the

same time help others to be good.

## **Life is Suffering**

If we contemplate deeply we have to agree with the concept that life is suffering. Every moment we are suffering, either physically or mentally. Can we find a single person in this world who is free from physical and mental pain? It is difficult. Even those who have attained sainthood are not free from physical pain so long as they sustain their physical bodies.

If anybody asked, “What is the most uncertain thing in this world?” — the correct answer would be “Life is the most uncertain thing.” Everything that we do in this world is to escape from suffering and death. If we neglect this life for even one second, that is more than enough for us to lose it. Most of our daily routine such as working, eating, drinking, taking medicine, sleeping and walking are ways and means adopted by us to avoid suffering and death. Although we occasionally experience some momentary worldly pleasure in satisfying our desires, the very next moment the thing that gave us pleasure might cause suffering. Therefore, the noble treasure of peace and happiness need not be in a rich man’s hand but in the man who has renounced worldly things.

Everything pertaining to our life is subject to change and unsatisfactoriness. That is why the Buddha has explained that as long as there is craving for worldly pleasure or desire for existence there is no escape from



physical and mental suffering. Desire is important for existence. When existence takes place suffering is unavoidable.

Many contemplate seeking eternal life, and yet, ironically, many seekers of immortality find life so boring that they do not even know how to pass the day! According to the Buddha, this craving for immortality is one of the causes for selfish ideas and fear of death.

“It is easy enough to be pleasant  
When life flows along like a song  
But the man worthwhile  
Is the man who can smile  
When life goes dead wrong.”

This little happiness is secured amidst many disappointments, failures and defeats. Man cannot find a life where there are no disturbances, problems, calamities, unsatisfactoriness, frustrations, fear, insecurity, loss, misfortunes, blame, sicknesses, old age and thousands of other uncongenial situations. Every day and night man is struggling to get rid of these unfortunate situations. The more he struggles to escape from this unhappy state of affairs in a worldly way, the more he entangles himself with some other problems. When he managed to get rid of one problem, intentionally or unintentionally he would have created for himself some other problems. Where then is the end of these problems? For our own survival, we have to accept

such difficulties and sufferings without complaining as there is no other alternative. Suffering will always be there! Yet suffering and unhappiness are not by any means inevitable. Suffering, says the Buddha, is a disease and it can therefore be cured completely when perfection is attained.

Lao Tze, a well-known Chinese religious teacher, said: "I have suffered because I have a body. If I had no physical body how can I suffer?"

When you look at how people suffer in this world, you can see the real situation of this worldly life. Why should they suffer in this way? And who is responsible for these sufferings? According to the Buddha each and every person is responsible for his own suffering. People are suffering here today because of their strong craving for existence. This is the main cause of suffering. It has taken more than 2500 years for many philosophers and psychologists to understand that what the Buddha had said is true. A poet says:-

"To the fire flies the moth  
 Knows not she will die.  
 Little fish bites in the hook.  
 Knows not of the danger.  
 But though knowing well the danger  
 Of these evil worldly pleasures,  
 We still cling to them so firmly.  
 Oh how great is our folly!"

## **Fleeting Nature of Life**

Buddhism points out that the duration of our life span is very short and we should work mindfully, vigilantly and heedfully for our salvation.

“People can never really understand  
That we are here but for a little spell.  
But they who grasp this truth indeed  
Suffer all strife and quarrels to abate.”

This is how Davis, a poet looks at the fleeting life.

“What is this life, so full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare?  
  
No time to stand beneath boughs  
And stare as long as sheep and cows.  
  
No time to see, when woods we pass,  
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.  
  
No time to see, in broad daylight,  
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.  
  
No time to turn at beauty’s glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can dance.  
  
No time to wait till her mouth can  
Enrich that smile her eyes began.  
  
A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.”

## **A Battlefield**

The whole universe is a vast battlefield. Existence is nothing but a vain struggle, elements against elements, energies against energies, men against men, women against women, men against animals, animals against men, men against nature, nature against men, and within the physical system itself it is a big battlefield. The mind itself is the biggest battlefield.

The man who is not at peace with himself cannot be at peace with the world, and external wars have to continue in order to hide the fact from individuals that the real war is within. The most important prayer of mankind today is for peace, but there can be no peace in this war-torn world until the conflicts of man with himself are ended.

In the eyes of the Buddha living beings tremble like fish in a stream that is almost dry, being in the grip of craving, either leaping hither and thither, like hares caught in a snare or lost like arrows shot at night. He saw the struggle of all against all, the senseless series of depredations, in which one feeds upon another, only in turn to be fed upon by others. War is created by the human mind and the same human mind can create peace with justice if man uses his unbiased mind.

World history tells us that racial discrimination, colour bar, religious fanaticism and greed for political power and wealth have created enormous miseries and disasters in this world and have taken a heavy toll of lives in a cruel way. These things have never contributed

anything towards development of the world. People who are thirsty for power and wealth and intoxicated with jealousy always create trouble and often try to justify their cruel acts by talking nonsense in the name of peace and justice. We are living in a world which is physically united but mentally divided and at the same time mentally united but physically divided.

“We live and work and dream,  
Each has his little scheme,  
Sometimes we laugh;  
Sometimes we cry.  
And thus the days go by.”

### **A Lot of Fuss**

We toil and slave to maintain our body. We commit untold evils to satisfy the needs and cravings of our body. We sought fame and publicity to meet the ego that is inherent in us. We do a thousand and one things to uphold the so-called prestige, and yet, when death comes, decay sets in and to the grave or crematorium we go - our body is no more.

In life we created a lot of fuss over our body. We do it in death as well. Khantipalo's poetical description of the undue fuss created by us is as follows:-

“A lot of fuss  
A lot of people  
A lot of time



A lot of trouble  
A lot of tears  
A lot of money –  
And all for what?  
A little body!  
A blob of proteins  
Fast unwinding,  
A little corpse  
Quick decaying.  
No longer is it  
Dear Father, mother  
Or any darling other.  
In spite of this  
We must have  
Consolations and coffins  
Processions and Tombstones  
Parties and mourning  
Rites and rituals  
Buried or burnt  
Embalmed for ever,  
All for these little  
Bloated bodies.  
Sons remember,  
Grandsons little,  
And after them  
Are the dead forgotten,  
Stones and bones alone remaining.  
So is this not  
A lot of nonsense?”

## Spiritual Values

Julian Huxley says: Life should lead to the fulfilment of innumerable possibilities – physical, mental, spiritual and so forth – that man is capable of. And humanity is capable of greater and nobler things.

You are born into this world to do some good and not to pass your time in idleness. If you are indolent, then you are a burden to this world. You must always think of rising higher in goodness and wisdom. You will be abusing the privileges of becoming a human being if you do not prove yourself worthy of the cause for which your merit has given you this place. To waste a man's existence in grieving over the past in idleness and heedlessness is to show his unfitness in this world. The tree of civilization has its roots in spiritual values which most of us have not realized. Without these roots the leaves would have fallen and the tree left a lifeless stump.

“If all the mountains were books and if all the lakes were ink and if all the trees were pens, still they would not suffice to depict all the misery in this world.” (Jacob Boehme)

That is why enlightened religious teachers like the Buddha after having seen this life in its proper perspective without any selfish or egoistic motives, explained that there is no real purpose of this life, if we allow this life to go round and round within this cycle of birth and death, while suffering physically and mentally. But we can make use of this life for a better purpose by being of service to others, by cultivating morality, by

training the mind and living as cultured men in peace and harmony with the rest of the world. According to the Buddha human beings are not puppets devoid of responsibilities. Man is the highest fruit of the tree of evolution. Our ancient philosophy, however, expresses the purpose of life in this way: "Leading from darkness to light, from untruth to truth and from death to deathlessness." These simple yet meaningful words give us food for thought.

### **Death and Immortality**

All the questions man asks about his life are related to the reality of death; he differs from all other creatures, it would seem, in being aware of his own death and in never being fully reconciled to sharing the natural fate of all living organisms. If only man can understand that life is short and that death is inevitable, he can solve many problems pertaining to life. In his resistance of death, man has achieved some prolongation of life which may be equated to a child playing at the sea-side, working desperately to build up his sand-castle before the next wave breaks over it. Man has often made death the centre of religious objects, invoking heavenly blessing for the gaining of everlasting life.

Death happens to all living beings, but man alone has created, out of the constant threat of death, a will to endure. And out of the desire for continuity and immortality in all their conceivable forms, man has created religion, which in its turn, has attempted to give

a more meaningful end to life.

Although the followers of many religions believe in the existence of heavenly abode where life would be one of perpetual bliss, we have yet to hear that the devout followers of any particular religion were at all keen to give up their earthly existence and things that they possess to be in heaven today itself. Similarly even Buddhists would prefer to cling on to their precious earthly existence as long as they survive, although they realize that life in this world is nothing but suffering, and that the ultimate bliss is Nibbana. Yet, how many are there to attain Nibbana by giving up craving?

The highest problem facing many countries today is the problem of population explosion. Ways and means have to be found to curb this perpetual swelling of this stream of life. These millions need food, shelter, comfort and security. To these people the question is not “what is the purpose of life” but “what to do with life”. The simple answer is that one should make the best use of life and find whatever happiness that one can grasp in a practical and righteous manner rather than worrying unduly on the metaphysical proposition of the mystical purpose of life. However, religion steps in to console man or rather awaken him to the fact that life is not dreary and hopeless as it is viewed from the physical body-basis alone. There is a hope for a better life.

All the progress in this world made by man, is due to the fact that he realizes that he is mortal and that he would like to leave his influence behind after he is gone.

If man were to achieve immortality and his days on earth would be endless, he would be inclined to take things easy and lose all incentive or initiative to be progressive; there would be no desire for him to make the world a little better place than he found it. If there was no death, life would become stagnant, monotonous and unspeakably burdensome and boring. If man were to be given the insight to realize and know the time of his death, he would definitely act differently from what he is doing presently.

**“Man’s Body Turns To Dust,  
But His Influence Persists” – (Buddha)**

Even though our ancestors are dead and gone, we can assume that they still exist with us not physically but through the influence created by them from generation to generation – the influence persists. By the term ‘ancestors’ we refer not only to our progenitors but also to all those who had contributed for the welfare and happiness of others. In this sense, we can say that the heroes, sages and poets of days gone by, are still existing amongst us – through their influence. As we link ourselves to these martyrs and thinkers we come to share the wisest thoughts, the noble ideals and even fascinating music of the centuries.

The cry of a man’s heart for a purpose is the dim Recognition of the nature of life. When a man feels his divine or noble nature, he no longer cries for a purpose of life, for he realizes that he is himself that very purpose.



Thinking people have realized that the course of human history is determined not by what happens in the skies, but by what takes place in the mind of men.

The Buddha said that there is no other supernatural living being higher than the perfect man.

Man can and must raise himself above limitation of his individuality, following in the footsteps of the Buddha.

### **Make the Best Use of Life**

The important point about life is that we have it and therefore we must make the best use of it. This indeed is the greatest value of life, the opportunity of making the best use of it. Many people lead narrow, limited, joyless and depressed lives because they do not try to make the best use of life. But this can be done by possessing and obeying ideals. What then should be our ideals? They are to cultivate humane qualities and to lead a happy and peaceful life. This way of life can be regarded as a noble righteous, cultured and religious life which is respected by everybody. A man cannot lead a happy life without making others happy.

Man must try to do his best and at the same time, must, when confronted by opposition, or rewarded by partial success, say to himself "I have done my best", and even when the battle is deemed to be lost, he would remember that the path of salvation lies not in the victory but in the acceptance of the battle.

“The fruit tree’s heavy-laden bough  
The river’s load of fertile soil  
The richly flowing milk of cows  
The good man’s unremitting toil;  
This wealth is meant, this work is done,  
For other’s good, not for their own.”

Thus, in essential, is the modern doctrine of Social Service, which also may be said to be the ethical foundation of all the great religions.

### **Nibbana**

“If any teach Nirvana is to cease  
Say unto such they lie,  
If any teach Nirvana is to live,  
Say unto such they err.”

*(Sir Edwin Arnold in The Light of Asia)*

The foregoing definition of life should be sufficient for anyone to understand the concept of attainment of Nibbana where such physical and mental pain exists no more, as Nibbana denotes the end of the suffering. The aim of our whole life is to cut off and minimize suffering and to seek happiness. If we really like to have everlasting happiness - the happiness that we experience when our minds are completely free from all disturbances, we must learn how to gain it. By gaining more wealth, power and other worldly conditions, we can never gain

real satisfaction, contentment, peace of mind and unchangeable happiness - which is termed 'calming the senses and cooling our burning defilements in the mind.'

It has to be remembered that no one is forcing us to take any particular line of action. There is nobody to punish us or to reward us. It is our own free will and choice. If you think that you can tolerate all the physical and mental pains and sufferings, you can remain within the cycle of birth and death and go on crying, lamenting, suffering, cursing, grumbling, fighting, worrying, and struggling for survival, working like slaves every day and night, confronting enormous problems and hindrances. In fact during our whole lifetime we are spending our time, energy and mind in a battlefield - fighting for survival, fighting for power, gain, name, pleasure and fighting to be free from various dangerous things. Occasionally we gain a little bit of momentary pleasure as an interlude. Every pleasure ends with suffering.

Look at the world, and you can see how people are fighting against each other, killing, burning, bombing, kidnapping, hijacking, and attacking one another. Destroying their fellow human beings has become a hobby or a fun. The whole world is like a mad house. People have forgotten their good human character and have allowed evil thoughts, evil words, and evil deeds to reign over them. Apparently there is no room in man's mind to cultivate good thoughts and deeds. How then can one find peace and happiness, in a battlefield in which one is continually fighting either for gain or escape from

some dangers? “Man’s inhuman attitude to man makes countless thousands mourn”.

If you can understand the uncertainty of life and danger of the world, then you can understand the meaning of attaining Nibbana. You would not delay your effort for the attainment of this blissful state. Today you are fighting to escape from suffering through a worldly mean. But it is a losing battle. There will be disappointments. However, if you try to get rid of your suffering by developing the spiritual aspect of your life, then you can find real peace. That is Nibbana.

### **Worldly Pleasures**

We know there are many in this world, even amongst Buddhists, who are not prepared to work for the attainment of Nibbana. For this reason, some have described Nibbana as a paradise where people can enjoy everlasting pleasures. Such a description will appeal to those who have very poor understanding about their life and worldly things and also to those who have very strong craving and attachment to their life and worldly pleasures. They cannot understand that such a concept of Nibbana is but a dream. Nevertheless worldly people always think and pray for this kind of Nibbana. On the other hand there are people who think that it is better to remain in this world inspite of all sorts of sufferings in order to enjoy their life. They fail to understand that due to their cravings and attachments which they have developed, they are unable to appreciate the supreme

bliss of Nibbana. The other worldly things which they consider as happiness cannot relieve them of physical and mental suffering.

According to the Buddha, it is due to ignorance that people crave for existence within this Samsara – cycle of birth and death – while enduring suffering and running after a mirage in perpetual search for something to please their senses. They should learn to calm their senses instead of placating them by fleeting indulgence.

### **Endless World System**

Some people think that if all of us attain Nibbana, this world will be an empty place and there will not be anybody to work for the progress of this world. This is a shallow idea appearing in the minds of such people who lack the real knowledge of existence.

They should understand that this world will never become empty since very few wise people will be able to attain Nibbana. As far as world systems are concerned, there is no limit to them. And there is no such thing as either the beginning or the end of world systems and the universe. World systems will always appear and disappear. When one world system disappears, many others remain. Meanwhile the dispersed world systems reappear due to combination of elements and energies. Living beings also who have departed from other world systems come into existence due to combination of these elements, matters and energies and their mental tendencies. One should not think that there are only a



limited number of living beings who go round and round in this universe. Living beings are unlimited and infinite.

### **Progress and Pollution**

Are we really working here for the progress of this world? We think that we are working for the progress of this world, but we are actually damaging this world. We have discovered many gadgets to destroy this world. Nature has produced so many things. To achieve our ends, we are damaging this world by digging, cutting, levelling and destroying the natural beauty of this earth. We are polluting the atmosphere, the rivers and the seas. We are destroying plant life as well as poor animal lives. We never think that in every plant life there are some food or medicinal values. And every living being contributes something for the maintenance of the environment. We should not assume that we human beings are the only people who have the right to live on this earth. Each and every living being has an equal right to live here. But we deprive other beings of their privileges. Not only that, even within our own human community, one race tries to destroy the other race, hindering its progress and not allowing others to live in peace. They declare wars and start to slaughter one another in the name of patriotism.

As long as human beings with polluted minds exist in this world there will be no peace on earth. It is due to the existence of such living beings that this earth has become a place of turmoil. Today we see blood-baths all

over the world. Each person is planning to swindle another person. Selfish ideas always prevail in their minds. One man cannot trust another man. They view others with suspicion in their hearts. One cannot understand the real character or motive of another man. Although man can escape from animals, it is difficult to escape from another man.

### **Man is Responsible**

People always talk about the uncertainty of the world situation. Who is responsible for this unfortunate situation? Is there anybody else other than the so-called smart man? How can we expect a better and peaceful world if men behave worse than animals? How can we enjoy our life in this unreliable world? Scientists seek to conquer nature for material ends. Eastern philosophy aspires to live in harmony with nature for peace of mind and spiritual achievement. You cannot change the worldly conditions according to your wishes but you can change your mind to develop contentment to find happiness. A man who is absorbed in seeking only worldly satisfaction will never reach higher knowledge, for it cannot be found without strenuous search. Materialism degrades man to the brute state while religion elevates man into the divine or noble state. In a materialistic regime men become slaves to their senses. Naturally most people dislike to see the true facts of life. They like to lull themselves into security by day dreaming, imagination and taking the shadow for the substance. The Buddha's attitude to

worldly powers and sensual pleasures is this: “Better than absolute sovereignty over the earth, better than going to heaven, better than even lordship over the worlds, is the fruit of a stream-winner — the first stage of perfection.” By spending his life only for the material worldly progress to feed desire it is impossible for man to see the end of unsatisfactoriness of his life. According to the Buddha this world is based on conflict, friction or unsatisfactoriness. By realizing the real nature of the worldly condition, the Buddha also said that he does not praise the world since it is unsatisfactory and impermanent. Again he says that the way to worldly gain is one and that to final goal – Nibbana – is another.

### **The Man and His Honey**

Here is a small parable for us to understand the nature of life and worldly pleasure: A man had lost his way when he was going through a thick forest covered with thorns and rocks. Then he was confronted by a huge elephant which started to chase him. He started to run for his life. While he was running he saw a well and he thought that this would be a good place for him to escape from the elephant. But very unfortunately he saw a big poisonous snake at the bottom of the well.

However, since there was no other way of escape from the elephant he jumped into the well and managed to get hold of a thick creeper that was growing on the side wall of the well. While he was hanging on to the creeper he saw two mice, a white one and a dark one.

To his horror he saw that these two mice were slowly cutting the creeper which he was holding on to. He also found a beehive closeby from which occasional drops of honey trickled down.

While facing his death in three ways in that dangerous position he greedily started to taste the honey drops. Seeing the pathetic situation of this poor man, another kind person who happened to pass by, volunteered to give a helping hand to save his life. But this greedy and foolish man refused to listen to him because of the taste of the honey he was enjoying. The taste of the honey had so intoxicated him that he preferred to ignore the dangerous position he was facing.

Here in this parable, the thorny path of the forest is equated to *Samsara* – the wheel of existence. The thorny path of *Samsara* is a very uncertain and troublesome one. It is not so easy for a person to carry on his life through the rough and thorny jungle of *Samsara*. The elephant here represents death. Death always follows us and makes us unhappy, our old age also creates unhappiness and insecurity in our minds. The creeper is our birth. Just as a creeper goes on growing and coiling with other plants, so also our birth goes on accumulating, holding, clinging to so many other things in this world. The two mice represents the day and night. From the very day that we were born in this world, the passage of day and night goes on cutting and shortening our life span. The drops of honey are the fleeting sensual worldly pleasures which tempt man to remain in this

impermanent and uncertain world. The kind man who came to give his helping hand to show him the correct path and to get rid of his dangerous situation is the Buddha.

A man who thinks that it is better for him to remain in this world to enjoy worldly life without trying to attain Nibbana, is exactly like this man who refused to escape from the dangerous situation of his life just to taste a little bit of honey. The purpose of Life is to gain liberation from physical and mental burden. ■